

## Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Interior

## § 785.16

be reviewed by the regulatory authority to evaluate the progress and development of mining activities to establish that the operator is proceeding in accordance with the terms of the variance—

(i) Within the sixth month preceding the third year from the date of its issuance;

(ii) Before each permit renewal; and

(iii) Not later than the middle of each permit term.

(2) Any review required under paragraph (d)(1) of this section need not be held if the permittee has demonstrated and the regulatory authority finds, in writing, within three months before the scheduled review, that all operations under the permit are proceeding and will continue to be conducted in accordance with the terms of the permit and requirements of the Act, this chapter, and the regulatory program.

(3) The terms and conditions of a permit for mountaintop removal mining may be modified at any time by the regulatory authority, if it determines that more stringent measures are necessary to insure that the operation involved is conducted in compliance with the requirements of the Act, this chapter, and the regulatory program.

[44 FR 15370, Mar. 13, 1979, as amended at 48 FR 39904, Sept. 1, 1983; 52 FR 39183, Oct. 20, 1987]

### § 785.15 Steep slope mining.

(a) This section applies to any persons who conducts or intends to conduct steep slope surface coal mining and reclamation operations, except—

(1) Where an operator proposes to conduct surface coal mining and reclamation operations on flat or gently rolling terrain, leaving a plain or predominantly flat area, but on which an occasional steep slope is encountered as the mining operation proceeds;

(2) Where a person obtains a permit under the provisions of § 785.14; or

(3) To the extent that a person obtains a permit incorporating a variance under § 785.16.

(b) Any application for a permit for surface coal mining and reclamation operations covered by this section shall contain sufficient information to establish that the operations will be conducted in accordance with the require-

ments of § 816.107 or § 817.107 of this chapter.

(c) No permit shall be issued for any operations covered by this section, unless the regulatory authority finds, in writing, that in addition to meeting all other requirements of this subchapter, the operation will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of § 816.107 or § 817.107 of this chapter.

[44 FR 15370, Mar. 13, 1979, as amended at 51 FR 9006, Mar. 17, 1986]

### § 785.16 Permits incorporating variances from approximate original contour restoration requirements for steep slope mining.

(a) The regulatory authority may issue a permit for non-mountaintop removal, steep slope, surface coal mining and reclamation operations which includes a variance from the requirements to restore the disturbed areas to their approximate original contour that are contained in §§ 816.102, 816.104, 816.105, and 816.107, or §§ 817.102 and 817.107 of this chapter. The permit may contain such a variance only if the regulatory authority finds, in writing, that the applicant has demonstrated, on the basis of a complete application, that the following requirements are met:

(1) After reclamation, the lands to be affected by the variance within the permit area will be suitable for an industrial, commercial, residential, or public postmining land use (including recreational facilities).

(2) The requirements of § 816.133 or § 817.133 of this chapter will be met.

(3) The watershed of lands within the proposed permit and adjacent areas will be improved by the operations when compared with the condition of the watershed before mining or with its condition if the approximate original contour were to be restored. The watershed will be deemed improved only if—

(i) The amount of total suspended solids or other pollutants discharged to ground or surface water from the permit area will be reduced, so as to improve the public or private uses or the ecology of such water, or flood hazards within the watershed containing the permit area will be reduced by reduction of the peak flow discharge from precipitation events or thaws;

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(ii) The total volume of flow from the proposed permit area, during every season of the year, will not vary in a way that adversely affects the ecology of any surface water or any existing or planned use of surface or ground water; and

(iii) The appropriate State environmental agency approves the plan.

(4) The owner of the surface of the lands within the permit area has knowingly requested, in writing, as part of the application, that a variance be granted. The request shall be made separately from any surface owner consent given for the operations under § 778.15 of this chapter and shall show an understanding that the variance could not be granted without the surface owner's request.

(b) If a variance is granted under this section—

(1) The requirements of § 816.133(d) or § 817.133(d) of this chapter shall be included as a specific condition of the permit; and

(2) The permit shall be specifically marked as containing a variance from approximate original contour.

(c) A permit incorporating a variance under this section shall be reviewed by the regulatory authority at least every 30 months following the issuance of the permit to evaluate the progress and development of the surface coal mining and reclamation operations to establish that the operator is proceeding in accordance with the terms of the variance.

(d) If the permittee demonstrates to the regulatory authority that the operations have been, and continue to be, conducted in compliance with the terms and conditions of the permit, the requirements of the Act, this chapter, and the regulatory program, the review specified in paragraph (c) of this section need not be held.

(e) The terms and conditions of a permit incorporating a variance under this section may be modified at any time by the regulatory authority, if it determines that more stringent measures are necessary to ensure that the operations involved are conducted in compliance with the requirements of the Act, this chapter, and the regulatory program.

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(f) The regulatory authority may grant variances in accordance with this section only if it has promulgated specific rules to govern the granting of variances in accordance with the provisions of this section and any necessary, more stringent requirements.

[48 FR 39904, Sept. 1, 1983, as amended at 48 FR 44780, Sept. 30, 1983; 56 FR 65635, Dec. 17, 1991]

### § 785.17 Prime farmland.

(a) This section applies to any person who conducts or intends to conduct surface coal mining and reclamation operations on prime farmlands historically used for cropland. This section does not apply to:

(1) Lands on which surface coal mining and reclamation operations are conducted pursuant to any permit issued prior to August 3, 1977; or

(2) Lands on which surface coal mining and reclamation operations are conducted pursuant to any renewal or revision of a permit issued prior to August 3, 1977; or

(3) Lands included in any existing surface coal mining operations for which a permit was issued for all or any part thereof prior to August 3, 1977, provided that:

(i) Such lands are part of a single continuous surface coal mining operation begun under a permit issued before August 3, 1977; and

(ii) The permittee had a legal right to mine the lands prior to August 3, 1977, through ownership, contract, or lease but not including an option to buy, lease, or contract; and

(iii) The lands contain part of a continuous recoverable coal seam that was being mined in a single continuous mining pit (or multiple pits if the lands are proven to be part of a single continuous surface coal mining operation) begun under a permit issued prior to August 3, 1977.

(4) For purposes of this section:

(i) "Renewal" of a permit shall mean a decision by the regulatory authority to extend the time by which the permittee may complete mining within the boundaries of the original permit, and "revision" of the permit shall mean a decision by the regulatory authority to allow changes in the method